

December 10, 1979

Memorandum

To: Western Regional Historian

Through: Chief of Interpretation, SEKI

From: Cultural Resources Specialist, Mineral King Planning Team

Subject: Cultural Resources in Mineral King Transfer Area

On November 16 I completed my field evaluation of cultural resources in the Mineral King transfer area of Sequoia National Park, California. This survey effort began in May, 1979, and continued on a part-time basis for roughly six months. I directed my efforts primarily toward historic resources as a field team from the WAC made a rather thorough search for prehistoric sites. As a result of my survey efforts, it is now obvious that the transfer area contains a number of significant historic sites potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Most of the significant resources in the Mineral King area are related to the 19th century mining history of the area. These should be documented and then nominated to the National Register as a historic district. When fully implemented, this historic district will consist of five separate units: (1.) the White Chief (Loop) Mine, (2.) the ruins of the Crabtree Cabin, (3.) the ruins of the New England Tunnel and Smelter Company smelter and sawmill, (4.) the Empire Mine and Mill complex including the Empire Mine, tramway right-of-way, millsite, and pipeline ruins, and (5.) that portion of the Mineral King Road which falls within the boundaries of Sequoia National Park.

Each of these units has obvious historical significance.

The White Chief (Loop) Mine was both the first mine discovered in the Mineral King mining district and the first mine to see attempted large-scale development. Remains at the site today include a half-dozen shafts and tunnels, scattered boards and bricks, and probable building sites. This patented claim is still privately owned, but the transfer legislation mandates acquisition.

The ruins of the Crabtree Cabin, a collapsed log structure, also are closely tied to the initial development of mining in this district. Crabtree discovered and developed the White Chief Mine. The ruins of his cabin are the most extensive structural remains dating from the early mining period at Mineral King. The ruins are on public land.

The arrival of the New England Tunnel and Smelting Company on the Mineral King scene in the mid-1870's marked the first attempt at developing the mines of the district beyond the prospecting stage. The company attempted to consolidate the known mines and develop modern milling facilities. The company took over the White Chief Mine (see above) and constructed a sawmill and smelter in Mineral King Valley. The ruins of these two valley facilities are still extant. The sawmill site is marked by large, most buried structural timbers, while scattered stone foundations, ore piles, and bits of slag mark the site of the adjacent smelter. An iron object which appears to be the water jacket from the smelter has been removed from the smelter site by avalanches and deposited 100 yards downhill in the East Fork of the Kaweah River. This site is easily accessible and located on public land.

The development of the Empire Mine complex in 1878-1880 marked the highpoint of mining interest in the Mineral King district. The mine itself received extensive development attention with some of the tunnels running upwards of 800 feet in length. From the mine, located high on the side of Empire Mountain, a bucket tramway transported ore a mile downhill to the Empire stamp mill. Water for the mill came from Monarch Creek via a one-half mile pipeline. Extensive ruins remain on these sites today. The underground workings of the mine are largely intact and believed to contain significant artifactual materials. Adjacent to the actual mine are the crushed ruins of a number of log buildings that constituted the Empire Mine camp. Along the mile-long tramway route, ore buckets, cable sections, and portions of old towers can still be found. The stamp mill is gone, destroyed by avalanches, but its foundations can still be seen. The old pipeline connecting the millsite with Monarch Creek is largely intact.

Significant portions of the Empire complex are located on privately owned lands. The first extension north on the Empire road is still a privately held, patented claim. Apparently, the main mine and the camp ruins are on public land, as are the tramway ruins. The millsite is located on the privately held Cedar Point Mining Claim and Millsite tract. Both these patented tracts are slated for acquisition.

The Mineral King Road, constructed by the Empire interests in 1879, also potentially qualifies for the National Register in the opinion of this evaluator. The construction of the road made possible the development of the Empire Mine and allowed the recreational village of Mineral King to develop after the failure of the mine. Moreover, the road is one of the very few essentially unaltered mountain roads of its time still extant and relatively unaltered. Less than two miles of the roughly fifteen miles of road within the park have been rerouted since 1880. The remainder of the road has been widened somewhat over the years, but the road as a whole retains a high degree of integrity.

The five units discussed above constitute the proposed Mineral King Historic District. One other significant cultural resource exists within the transfer district: the Kaweah Han estate. Built in the late 1930's, the two houses of the Kaweah Han constitute superlative examples privately constructed rustic architecture. Both the main house and the guest cottage are large rustic structures built of handhewn timbers, heavy stones and other natural materials. The interiors include much decorative wallpainting and custom furniture. These buildings are not yet fifty years old, but when they reach that point in the late 1980's, they will be eligible for the National Register. At this time the Kaweah Han estate is privately owned, but negotiations for government purchase have already begun. Purchase may be consummated during FY 1980.

Since the Kaweah Han estate is not related to the 19th century mining story of Mineral King, it does not make sense to incorporate this unit into the Mineral King Historic District. When the Kaweah Han becomes eligible for the National Register, it should be nominated as a separate property.

During the past six months numerous additional sites and structures within the Mineral King transfer area have been evaluated for their possible significance as cultural resources. All have been found lacking with respect to National Register

criteria. Other sites or structures evaluated have included: (1.) the upper White Chief Canyon cabin ruins, (2.) the old cabins ruins at Aspen Flat and those located partway up Farewell Gap and Franklin Creek, (3.) the Black Wolf Mine, (4.) the Dolly Varden Mine, (5.) the Salt Grass Mine, (6.) the East Mineral King permit cabins, (7.) the current Ranger Station, (8.) the Wester Mineral King (Faculty Flat) permit cabins, (9.) Weiskar's sawmill site, (10.) Silver City, (11.) the Cabin Cove permit cabins, and (12.) the ruins of Camp Conifer.

Particular attention was paid to the permit cabins in East and West Mineral King. According to the best evidence available, no existing structures of any size in the West Mineral King tract date from before 1920, and most are younger yet. The cabins in East Mineral King are somewhat older, some dating back probably to the early years of this century. Cabins 5, 7, 16, and 17 in this area seem to be the oldest and least altered. But a careful field inspection of these buildings on November 16 failed to confirm special significance. All are built with round, wire-type nails, and each shows considerable signs of alteration when closely studied. The Mineral King Association has promised to make available next year detailed histories of the Mineral King cabins. Until such time as they provide additional data, however, it is my opinion that the cabins of Mineral King do not meet the criteria necessary for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

The remaining cultural resource problem in Mineral King is largely curatorial. Numerous historic artifacts have been field collected by the cabin permittees in years past. The Park Service must develop and execute a plan for regaining public title to these often significant items, while at the same time not alienating the cabin holders. Such a plan very well may require development of artifact display facilities at Mineral King.

William C. Tweed, Ph.D.
Cultural Resources Specialist
Mineral King Planning Team

cc: Koning, J. Parks, MK Interp. File, Sierra Dist.